



West Coast Senators Urge Disaster Relief for Fishing Communities

July 11, 2006

Washington, DC – In the wake of a declaration of fishery resource disaster off the Western U.S. coastline, the Senators from California, Oregon and Washington joined forces today to urge \$73 million in relief for affected fishing communities.

The six Senators, Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), sent a letter seeking the funds to Senators Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) and Robert Byrd (D-W.V.), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senators Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) and Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), the chairman and ranking member of the Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee.

Their request was based on an earlier letter received from Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger urging assistance. *(copies of that letter are available upon request)*

“I am deeply concerned about the families and businesses hurt by the nearly complete closure of the salmon fishing season,” Senator Feinstein said. **“Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez declared a fishery resource disaster last week to help provide relief to the affected fishing communities. That was an important step forward, but much more needs to be done. I am determined to work closely with my colleagues to bring critical assistance to the area.”**

“We have salmon fishermen in crisis,” Senator Smith said. **“Help is needed now. Support to pay bills, keep food on the table, and maintain infrastructure. We risk losing the entire industry if action isn’t taken quickly. Assisting the fishermen until water conditions can be improved is a must.”**

“Time is running out for our coastal communities and our salmon fishermen and businesses, who are paying the price for this Administration’s mismanagement of the Klamath River. With so many hundreds of California families’ livelihoods on the line, we will take this fight to the full Senate to get needed disaster relief as soon as possible,” Senator Barbara Boxer said.

“Folks in our coastal communities are watching Washington, D.C. like never before, waiting to see if they’re going to get the help they need to survive this disastrous salmon

fishing season,” Senator Wyden said. “At a time when businesses are already closing, we need to act quickly to address the immediate financial needs of our fishers and the communities that depend on salmon for their livelihoods.”

The following is the text of the letter from the six Senators:

“Last week, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez declared this salmon fishing season, in the states of California and Oregon, a fishery resource disaster. We are writing to seek your immediate assistance in providing disaster relief funds to the affected Oregon, California and Washington fishing communities.

The Secretary declared a fishery resource disaster in response to the federal government's April 28th decision to severely limit commercial salmon fishing at Point Falcon in Oregon to south of the Monterey Bay in California.

For the third consecutive year, the number of naturally spawning Klamath River Chinook salmon is expected to fall below the conservation floor called for in the fishery management plan for salmon. As a result, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (the Council) closed commercial salmon fishing this season along more than 400 nautical miles, stretching from Florence, Oregon to Pigeon Point, California.

This is the largest fishery closure ever on the West Coast and is already having a devastating impact on our rural, coastal economies. Over the last month, we have heard repeated accounts from our coastal communities of businesses closing and people missing mortgage, lease, and electricity payments. There are 1042 salmon trollers in the affected area, and thousands of fishermen whose livelihoods have been taken away from them.

The Governors of Oregon and California have sent you a letter estimating that the impact to Oregon's and California's coastal communities will be \$81 million. The States are contributing their own resources to help, \$5 million in grants from the State of California and \$3.2 million from the State of Oregon. These State contributions, however, still leave an unmet funding need of \$73 million to avoid a financial disaster for fishermen and women and their communities on top of the natural disaster that the Secretary of Commerce has declared. Given the Secretary's declaration, we believe that this constitutes an emergency.

Last month, the Senate passed legislation (Sec. 114(c) of S.2012) that makes salmon fishermen and supporting businesses in Oregon and California eligible for direct assistance. This is an important step toward bringing relief to our coast, but funding is still needed. We request your help to provide immediate disaster relief to the affected communities in our states.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our request. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments.”

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